

A migration of (Eurasian) Nightjars *Caprimulgus (europaeus)* at Cape Guardafui, Somalia

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The Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* is surprisingly poorly known in Somalia, although 3 races have been recorded: *europaeus* and *plumipes* once each and *unwini* on 5 occasions. Including birds not subspecifically identified, there are still only 10 records from the country:—

C. e. europaeus.

“Coste Somalia italiana”, October (year unknown) (Heuglin (1859), referred to in Moltoni (1936)). The locality is queried by Moltoni, possibly because he was unsure whether it referred to British or Italian Somaliland. Also, the subspecific identification of this bird is questionable, for although it is listed as *C. e. europaeus* by Moltoni, Heuglin’s original record merely refers to *C. europaeus*.

C. e. plumipes.

Guardafui (11° 50'N, 51° 16'E), 5 October (year unknown) (Moreau 1972). We have not traced the original authority for this record, but suspect that it may refer to Lynes’s record quoted below from Archer & Godman (1961), though in fact the dates are different. The specimen is not in the British Museum (BMNH) (P. R. Colston, 15.ii.82).

C. e. unwini.

1. Zeila (11° 21'N, 43° 28'E), ♀, 11 Nov. 1899 (Ogilvie-Grant 1901).
2. Belindula, nr. Galkayu (6° 50'N, 47° 30'E), ♂, 7 Sep. 1903 (Witherby & Hamerton 1905). This specimen was collected by Hamerton, and recorded by Moltoni (1936) as “non molto distante de Gallaciao”. We have been unable to locate Belindula, and Moltoni is probably incorrect in stating that it is near Galkayu. This bird is recorded on the same date as from Behendula (10° 11'N, 45° 08'E) in Archer & Godman (1961), and we think that this is the correct record and the one to which Moltoni was referring.
3. Off Guardafui (11° 50'N, 51° 16'E), ♀, 6 Nov. 1907, collected by Lynes, one of 2 seen on board a ship (Archer & Godman 1961). This specimen is in the BMNH (1934.1.1.3232) (P. R. Colston, 15.ii.82).
4. Hargeisa (9° 32'N, 44° 03'E), 19 Sep. 1917 (Archer & Godman 1961).
5. Mogadishu (2° 03'N, 45° 21'E), 25 Oct. 1981, ♀ collected (J. S. Ash). The specimen is in the National Museum, Nairobi.

P. R. Colston (15.ii.82) has provided 2 further relevant records which, although not strictly belonging to Somalia, are of interest: a ♀ *C. e. unwini* was collected by Lynes on 3 Nov. 1931 50 miles off the southern Somalia coast at c. 1°N, 45°E—the specimen is in the BMNH (1932.5.10. 719); and south of Socotra at 10° 51'N, 53° 07'E, one *C. europaeus* came on board ship, almost certainly *unwini*, on 2 Nov. 1962 (P. R. Colston).

We can now add 3 more records from northeast Somalia, including an account of a large number of departing migrants. None, however, was handled and specific identification must remain presumptive for the migrating birds, although they were most likely to be *C. europaeus*.

At 9 km southeast of Alula at $11^{\circ} 55' N$, $50^{\circ} 49' E$, one *C. europaeus* was seen very well on the ground in a patch of thornbush containing many other migrants on 3 May 1980.

At Tohen ($11^{\circ} 44' N$, $51^{\circ} 15' E$), 122+ were counted on the same day, 3 May 1980 (see below).

At Tohen, 2 *C. europaeus* were seen on 4 May 1980.

On 3 May it was a most stirring spectacle for the two of us to stand at that remote and barren site after weeks of rough travel, to find ourselves in the midst of a large migration of nightjars setting off over the sea at night, possibly on a major flyway. The observation was made from the top of a low escarpment above the village of Tohen, which is on the north side of the mouth of a wadi, 12 km south of Cape Guardafui. The wadi, immediately to the south of the observation point, runs east-west, and light from the Guardafui lighthouse was clearly visible to the north. At late dusk nightjars began to rise out of the wadi flying off north all round the observers. In the next 10 minutes 122 were counted, but this was an unknown fraction of the birds involved, as many other more distant uncounted shadowy shapes could be seen and the movement was still in progress when it became too dark to see them. With a compass it was determined that they were heading steadily on a 28° course (wind 170° c. Force 4 on the Beaufort scale, clear sky).

A search of the wadi at Tohen at dawn of the day following the migration revealed only 2 Eurasian Nightjars in the *Tamarix*, so possibly the birds seen the previous evening were drawn from a much larger area of scattered patches of thornbush to the south. On the following evening, travelling westwards along the north Somalia coast from Habo ($11^{\circ} 47' N$, $50^{\circ} 32' E$) to Durbo ($11^{\circ} 37' N$, $50^{\circ} 19' E$), a close watch was kept for nightjars passing over or through the fringing line of steep coastal hills, but none was seen, suggesting that the birds were concentrated at Cape Guardafui and that the area may be an important rendezvous for nightjars in both spring and autumn (for 2 of the earlier Somalia records were at Guardafui in autumn and a third at sea was not far off).

The birds on 3 May were presumably setting off on a crossing of the Gulf of Aden from the Arabian mainland, whose coast would be crossed at about Salah ($16^{\circ} 56' N$, $53^{\circ} 59' E$) in southern Oman, 380 km distant, if this flight direction were maintained on a great circle course, bringing them over land well before dawn. This, of course, does not take into account any possible wind-drift factor. The prevailing half-tail wind presumably would increase their ground-speed considerably. If they rested in Oman through the following day, as they presumably had done in Somalia, a second leg on the same bearing could take them to Muscat ($23^{\circ} 37' N$, $58^{\circ} 36' E$), on the southern shore of the Gulf of Oman, after a further 820 km flight over the desert. This point might be reached within a few hours after dawn, and again a day's rest could follow. A further flight on the same bearing and they would be at about the centre of the known breeding range of *unwini*.

We do not know if the birds fed in the wadi at Tohen, where there were freshwater pools and *Tamarix* thickets, but if they did it could not have been for long unless it had been during the day or near dawn or unless they had been there for more than 24 hours. Thus these birds may well have been embarking on a sea-passage of nearly 400 km, and an unknown distance

beyond, on empty stomachs, though presumably with adequate lipid reserves for the journey. The question arises: where did they fatten-up before reaching Guardafui? A possible clue is provided by Moreau (1972) who refers to parties of migrant *C. europaeus* in Kenya in spring, and Britton (1980) who states that it is mainly known on passage in East Africa during Oct.-Nov. and Mar.-Apr., when most specimens from E. Tanzania are *unwini*, and at Ngulia in E. Kenya where about 30% of the migrants handled are pale *unwini* or *plumipes*. Nightjars can presumably feed whilst migrating at night, but little food would be available over the short distance of barren rock and sand between Tohen and Guardafui, and nothing at all over the sea. The next meal therefore probably lay at least 10 hours ahead over Arabia.

Meinertzhagen (1954) says of *unwini* that, although several specimens have been taken on ships off the coast in Oct. and Apr., it has never been taken on Peninsula Arabia. He adds that immense (*sic*) numbers congregate just before passage, which is at night, but unfortunately he gives no details. More recently Gallagher & Rogers (1980) mention it as a regular passage migrant in Dhofar, Oman, and record 2 in Sep., of which one was collected (*unwini*, BM 1977.21.14). Jennings (1981) lists *C. europaeus* as an uncommon migrant in all areas in Saudi Arabia. Thus the species is fairly common in East Africa, uncommon in Saudi Arabia, but regular in Dhofar (the presumed landfall of the birds leaving Guardafui in spring). Its previous apparent scarcity in Somalia is presumably due to it being overlooked, undoubtedly because possible areas of concentration have not been visited by ornithologists; but the chances of anyone being at Guardafui during the probably brief duration of nightjar migration are utterly remote, and the same must apply to much of the Arabian peninsula, so that they could be overlooked there too. The above data suggest a link for *C. e. unwini* between E. Tanzania, where this race is concentrated, Guardafui, Dhofar and its breeding range, all of which are on the same great circle.

The presumptive identification of the night-flying birds as *C. europaeus* rests on the certain identification of grounded birds in the area on the same and following day, together with the supporting evidence of the 3 earlier autumn records. Only the Plain-backed Nightjar *C. inornatus*, Nubian Nightjar *C. nubicus tamaricis*, and Egyptian Nightjar *C. aegyptius* are possible alternatives. All are unlikely in large numbers, whereas *europaeus* is known to congregate on migration; also *inornatus* is unknown in eastern Somalia and there is no evidence that it is a migrant in this part of its range, while *nubicus* is a distinctly smaller species and there has been only one occurrence of *aegyptius* in Somalia.

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IN BRIEF

A Gon-gon *Pterodroma (mollis) feae* in Israel

In *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1: 130) it is reported on the authority of Professor H. Mendelssohn that a species of Soft-plumaged Petrel was found dead on the west shore of the Dead Sea in February 1963. Since it is of interest to know whether it arrived there from the Atlantic via the Mediterranean or from the Southern Ocean via the Red Sea I enquired whether further details were available. I am grateful to Tsila Shariv for the information that it was found on 8 February and is preserved in the Department of Zoology at Tel Aviv University. The wing measures 260 mm, the tail 115 mm, the culmen 27 mm, the tarsus 33 mm and the overall length is 383 mm. This lies in the region of overlap of the southern form *Pterodroma mollis* and its larger representative in the North Atlantic *P. feae*; but it is reported to have a white breast without a pectoral band, which is more characteristic of *P. feae*. This suggests that it probably came from the North Atlantic via the Mediterranean, in contrast (for example) with a wasted Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis* in the same collection found on the beach at Eilat on 13 January 1958, which must have come from the Indian Ocean (*Ibis* 109: 159, 110: 27).

This information came too late for inclusion in Bourne (1983) (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 103: 52-58).

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Dunlin *Calidris alpina* in South America

Petersen *et al.* (1981) have published data on what they believed to be the first Dunlin *Calidris alpina* record for South America. They recorded a number of sightings in Peru during 1978 and 1979. While working on geographical variation of the Dunlin (Greenwood 1979) I examined a series of skins from the Copenhagen University Museum. Amongst these was an adult male taken on 15 January 1926 at Cayenne, French Guiana (4° 55'N, 52° 18'W) (Catalogue number 36.029).